

Publicity and Some of Its Results, Including a Romance of Our Square and a Eulogy of Wearing the Green.

THAT men of the sobriety and standing of Cyrus the Gaunt, MacLachan, Leon Coventry, the Little Red Doctor, and Boggs (I do not count young Phil Stacey) should paint their noses green and frequent dubious cellar-bars, because a righteously enraged populace would have killed 'em in early childhood. He's the smuggest fraud and best seller in the United States. "Wheelwright" is the crudest, shrewdest, most impudent panderer to weak-minded—"

"'Whew! Help! I didn't know what I was starting," protested my visitor. "As a literary critic you're some big bertha, Domine. I begin to suspect that you don't care an awful lot about Mr. Wheelwright's style of composition. Just the same, I've got to read him—all of him. Do you think I'll find his stuff in the *Penny Circulator*?"

"My poor, lost boy! Probably not. It is doubtless all out in the hands of eager readers."

However, Phil contrived to round it up somewhere. The awful and unexpected results I beheld on my first visit of patronage to Barbran's cellar, the occasion being the formal opening. A large and curious crowd of five persons, including myself and Phil Stacey, was there. Outside, an old English design of a signboard with a wheel on it crept despairingly in the wind. Below was a legend, "At the Sign of the Wheelwright."

The interior of the cellar was decorated with scenes from the novels of Harvey Wheelwright, triumphant virtue, discomfited villains, benignant blessings, chaste embraces, edifying death beds and orange blossoms. They were unsigned, but well I knew whose was the shame. Over the fireplace hung a framed letter from the great soul. It began: "Dear Young Friend and Admirer," and ended, "Yours for the light, Harvey Wheelwright."

The guests ate and drank everything in sight. They then left; that is to say, four of them did. Finally Phil departed, glowering at me. I am a patient soul. No sooner had the door slammed behind him than I turned to Barbran, who was looking discouraged.

"Well, what have you to say in your defense?"

The way Barbran's eyebrows went up constituted in itself a defense fit to move any jury to acquittal.

"For what?" she asked.

"For corrupting my young friend Stacey. You made him paint those pictures."

"They're very nice," returned Barbran demurely. "Quite true to the subject."

"They're awful. They're an insult to civilization. They're an insult to our square. Of all subjects in the world—Harvey Wheelwright! Why, Barbran?"

"Business," said Barbran.

"Explain, please," said I.

"I got the idea from a friend of mine in Washington Square. She got up a little cigar cafe, built around Alice in Wonderland, you know—and the looking glass. Through Alice, I could do it with Harvey Wheelwright."

"The name of Hatta and the March Hare, why?"

"Because for one person who reads Alice nowadays ten read the author of *Reborn Through Righteousness* and 'Called by the Cause.' Isn't it so?"

"Mathematically unimpeachable."

"Therefore, I ought to get ten times as many people as the other place. Don't you think so?" she inquired wistfully.

"Undoubtedly," I agreed. "But do you love him?"

"Who?" said Barbran with a start. The faint pink color ran up her cheeks.

"Harvey Wheelwright, of course. Whom did you think I meant?"

"He is a very estimable writer," returned Barbran primly.

"Good-night, Barbran," said I sadly. "I'm going out to mourn your lost soul."

"She's a peach," asperverated my companion.

"Substantially what I was remarking. As for your other hint, you need no introduction to Barbran. Nobody does."

"What?" Phil Stacey's plain face became ugly. A hostile light glinted in his eyes. "What do you mean by that?" he growled.

"Simply that she's about to become a local institution. She's plotting against the peace and security of our square, to the extent of starting a coffee house at No. 26."

"Good news!" cried Phil joyously. "Good news!"

"As a fab. she's a budding millionaire from the west."

"No!" growled Phil, his face falling.

"Bad news, eh? It occurred to me that she might want some decorations, and that you might be the one to do them."

In his leisure hours my young friend, who is an accountant by trade, perpetrates impressionistic decorations and scenery for such minor theaters as will endure them.

"You're a grand old man, Domine," said he. "Let's go!"

We went. We found Barbran. We conversed. Half an hour later, when I left them, they were deeply engrossed in a mutual discussion upon decorations, religion, the high cost of living, free verse, two-cent transfers, Charlie Chaplin, aviation, and other equally safe topics. Did I say safe? Dangerous is what I mean. For when a youth who is as homely as young Phil Stacey and in his particular style of homeliness and a girl who is as far from homely as Barbran himself at first sight to explore each other's opinions, they are venturing into a dim and haunted region, lighted by will o' the wisps and beset with perils and pitfalls.

PHIL STACEY some three days thereafter came to my rooms.

"Domine," said he, "I want to tap you here. Have you got any of the works of Harvey Wheelwright?"

"Love forfend," said I.

Phil looked surprised.

"It is as bad as that. I didn't suppose there was anything wrong with the stuff."

"Don't you imperil your decent young soul with it?" I advised earnestly. "It reeks of poisonous pietry. The world he paints is so full of

nauseating virtues that any self-respecting man would rather live in hades. No such people as his characters ever lived or ever could live, because a righteously enraged populace would have killed 'em in early childhood. He's the smuggest fraud and best seller in the United States."

The Bonnie Lassie, whose artistic devotions often take her far afield, met Barbran. They went for coffee to a queer little burrow decorated with improving sentiments from the immortal Lewis Carroll, which Barbran told the Bonnie Lassie, was making its blue-smocked, bobbed-haired, attractive and shrewd little proprietress quite rich. Barbran hinted that she was thinking of proving on the *Mole's Hole* idea, if she could find a suitable location.

The Bonnie Lassie was not impressed. What did impress her about Barbran was a certain gay yet restful charm, the sort of difficult thing that our indomitable sculptress loves to catch and fix in her wonderful little bronzes. She set about catching Barbran.

Barbran came to the Bonnie Lassie's house, moused about our square in a rapt manner and stayed. She rented a room from the Angel of Death ("Boggs Kills Bugs") is the remainder of his sign), just over Madame Taffalafferr's apartments, and in the course of time stopped at my bench and looked at me contemplatively. She was a small person, with shy, soft eyes.

She sat down and smiled at me.

"I'm going to start a coffee cellar," she said.

"You are, Miss Barbara Ann Waterbury?"

"It is true that my parents named me that," she said, "but my friends call me 'Barbran' because I always used to call myself that when I was little, and I want to be called Barbran here."

"That's very friendly of you," I observed.

"You think I'm a fool," she observed calmly. "But I'm not. I'm going to become a local institution. A local institution can't be called Barbara Ann Waterbury, unless it's a creche or a drinking fountain or something like that, can it?"

"It cannot, Barbran."

"Thank you, Mr. Domine," said Barbran gratefully.

She then proceeded to sketch out for me her plans for making her coffee cellar and herself a local institution, which should lure hopeful seekers for Bohemia from the far parts of Harlem and Jersey City, and even such outer realms of darkness as New Haven and worse.

"That's what I intend to do," said Barbran, "as soon as I get my great idea worked out."

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WHAT the great idea was I was to learn later from the lips of young Phil Stacey, who appeared shortly after my friend had departed, a peculiar look upon his extremely plain and friendly face. Said young Phil carelessly:

"Domine, who's the newcomer?"

"That," said I, "is Barbran."

"Barbran," he repeated with a rising inflection. "It sounds like a breakfast food."

"As she pronounces it, it sounds like a strain of music," said I.

"I am not officially authorized to communicate that."

"Are you officially authorized to present your friends to her?"

"On what do you base your claim to acquaintanceship, my boy?" I asked austere.

"Oh, claim! Well you see, a couple of days ago she was on the cross-town car, and—I well, I just happened to notice her, you know. That's all."

"Yet I am informed on good and sufficient authority that her appearance is not such as to command her, visually, if I may so express myself, to the eyes of the general eye."

"What's the fool—" began Mr. Stacey hotly.

"Tut-tut, my young friend," said I. "Certain ladies whom we both esteem can and will prove to the satisfaction of the fair-minded that none of the young person's features is exactly what it should be or precisely where it ought to be. Nevertheless, the net result is surprising and even gratifying."

"She's a peach," asperverated my companion.

"Substantially what I was remarking. As for your other hint, you need no introduction to Barbran. Nobody does."

"What?" Phil Stacey's plain face became ugly. A hostile light glinted in his eyes. "What do you mean by that?" he growled.

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